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OHIO LEATHER WORKS

City, partnership hit stalemate

Girard Mayor James Melfi says there is no longer room for negotiating with the partnership.

By TIM YOVICH
VINDICATOR TRUMBULL STAFF

GIRARD — A deal for the city to gain ownership of the Ohio Leather Works property has fallen through.

Mayor James Melfi said Thursday that he has instructed Atty. Richard G. Zellers of Youngstown to seek a court date in the lawsuit the city had filed foreclosing on the property owner, Leatherworks Partnership. The 27 acres in question are along U.S. Route 422.

Joseph F. Rafidi, partnership general manager, could not be reached to comment.

Judge John M. Stuard of Trumbull County Common Pleas Court had assigned the case to Atty. Anthony Cornicelli, a court magistrate, to mediate. After two hearings, it appeared the lawsuit had been settled.

At the last hearing, held Friday, Rafidi said he would recommend the settlement to the partners.

No response: If the deal was approved by the partnership, Rafidi was to give \$25,000 and a signed deed to the city by 5 p.m. Tuesday. Melfi said he hasn't received either.

Melfi said he anticipated the deal

would not work.

"I did not expect this group to be straightforward with the process," the mayor asserted. "There is no [longer] room for negotiations."

The sides agreed last week if a settlement could not be reached, the case would be heard by Cornicelli, because he is familiar with the issues.

Melfi said the city has \$300,000 from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to study or clean up environmental hazards on the property.

Leatherworks Partnership can use its own money, the mayor added, to make the land environmentally safe, if need be.

Agreement details: Under the agreement, the city was to receive \$75,000, plus an undetermined amount for legal fees, paid in installments within a year.

The EPA grant would have been used to rectify environmental problems with the property, which was used by a tannery business until about 30 years ago.

Leatherworks Partnership would have been the land's developer under a construction timetable, and the city would have forgiven about \$200,000 in fines the partnership accumulated after the city declared the property a safety hazard.